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RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT PRIORITY 2190
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001009

SIPDIS

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MANAMA FOR DS/MRDCH
DEPT FOR DS/C/DC AND L/DL SUSAN BENDA;
CA FOR CA/VO JUNE KUNSMAN AND DONI PHILLIPS; CA/OCS KIM
RICHTER; AND CA/EX DEAN HAAS AND EMELY SIMONE
FRANKFURT FOR DS/FRDCD
CAIRO FOR RIMC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2017

TAGS: [ADCO](#) [ADPM](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [ASEC](#) [ACOA](#) [ATRN](#) [KRIM](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: QATAR MFA WARNED THAT VISA SUSPENSION LOOMS IF
DIPLOMATIC POUCH DELIVERIES CANNOT RESUME

REF: DOHA 893 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,
for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Charge d'Affaires, accompanied by P/E Chief, informed MFA Assistant Minister for Follow-up Affairs Mohamed Al-Rumaihi October 22 that November 1 would be the last day Embassy Doha could issue U.S. visas due to a shortage of visa foils, which the Embassy must receive by classified diplomatic pouch. (Note: The U.S. suspended classified diplomatic pouch shipments to Doha following Qatar's implementation in early May 2007 of a policy requiring that all incoming diplomatic pouches be x-rayed -- see reftels for background.) Qatar's former DCM in Washington, Ali Al Thani, also attended the meeting. Charge reminded Al-Rumaihi that he had predicted in their conversations over the past several weeks and months that the supply of visa foils would eventually be exhausted. That day had come.

12. (C) Al-Rumaihi responded by suggesting that MFA could perhaps resolve the problem without the help of other government entities if the U.S. would agree to specify in advance on an "exceptional" basis the quantity of diplomatic pouches that would arrive in Qatar on a given date. MFA, Al-Rumaihi offered, could on its own authority work with various Qatari agencies to have those pouches exempted from any inspection. Charge expressed his appreciation for the gesture, but made clear that the U.S. sought Qatar's consistent implementation of a policy in accordance with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations that would at all times prohibit the search, x-ray, or inspection of diplomatic pouches.

13. (C) Charge provided Al-Rumaihi with an advance copy of the announcement that Embassy Doha will post on its web site on October 25 announcing the suspension of visa services. Charge underscored the portion of the announcement stating that U.S. regulations require the shipment of visa foils by classified pouch, and the Government of Qatar, through its failure to allow unfettered entry of these pouches, was failing to abide by its obligations under the Vienna Convention. Al-Rumaihi stated that interpreting the Vienna Convention was the sovereign right of Qatar, particularly in light of Qatar's reservation to that Convention, and Qatar's treatment of pouches under that convention had to be discussed with all countries concerned, not just the U.S.

Al-Rumaihi reiterated that the GOQ could provide occasional "exceptions" for the U.S., France and Britain (the three countries most affected by current policy) but Qatar was firm on its underlying interpretation of the Vienna Convention.

¶4. (C) Charge conveyed the U.S. view that the Vienna Convention allows for embassies to receive diplomatic pouches without x-raying and that Qatar's reservation to the Vienna Convention does not permit the current GOQ policy.

Al-Rumaihi undertook to pass the information on the imminent visa suspension to Customs and unspecified other authorities.

He also indicated he would inform Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim. Al-Rumaihi voiced concern that Qatari Customs believes strongly in the need for the x-ray requirement, that higher levels of the GOQ would consider the visa suspension an act of political pressure to which Qatar would not succumb, and that this would not be helpful to resolving the dispute. Charge made clear that the suspension was a practical result of our inability to bring in visa foils and in no way was a political act. He emphasized that at no time had the U.S. retaliated against Qatar since the dispute began.

¶5. (C) Al-Rumaihi said his primary concern was the perspective among senior GOQ officials that Qatari diplomats and diplomatic pouches were regularly x-rayed and inspected at U.S. airports. Charge stressed that this was not the case provided that the diplomatic courier and pouch were both properly identified. With respect to poor treatment of diplomats by airport security personnel, something Al-Rumaihi noted he himself had encountered, Charge said such treatment was inexcusable but nonetheless did not rise to the level of a nation's treaty obligations. In closing, charge reminded Al-Rumaihi that this issue had dragged on for nearly six

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months and that the Embassy still had not received a response to former Ambassador Untermeyer's August 14 letter to the Foreign Minister on the issue. Al-Rumaihi concluded that the pouch dispute created a bad atmosphere but was hopeful that the matter could be favorably resolved.

RATNEY